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(54) Single mode optical fibre attenuators.

(57) A single mode optical fibre preset attenuator is made by forming a fusion splice (2) between a length of silica fibre possessing no internal waveguiding structure to a length (1) of single mode optical fibre. Then the silica fibre is cut to a predetermined length to form a short stub (3) which is fusion spliced to a second length (4) of single mode fibre. The fusion splicing equipment may subsequently be used to heat soften the central region of the stub to enable it to be shortened or lengthened to fine tune the attenuation provided.

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SINGLE MODE OPTICAL FIBRE ATTENUATORS

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There exists in some single mode optical fibre systems a need for fixed attenuators. One method by which such an attenuator may be produced is described in published UK Specification No. 2128766A, and involves the 15 localised heating of a single mode fibre to promote diffusion across the core/cladding interface in that region to produce a localised weakening of the strength of waveguiding, and hence an increase in attenuation. The amount of attenuation provided by this method depends 20 upon the length of the heated zone, the temperature of heating, and the duration. This value can be increased by further heating, but no method is described by which it can be reduced.

The present invention is concerned with the 25 provision of a preset type of attenuator. In this context the word preset is used to signify that in an initial stage of manufacture the attenuator is constructed to provide an attenuation value defined within relatively coarse limits, and that after this the 30 attenuator is capable, in a subsequent fine tuning stage of manufacture, of having its attenuation value adjusted, upwards or downwards, to bring it within finer limits, but that no means are provided for subsequent adjustment of this value during the course of operational use of the 35 attenuator.

According to the present invention there is provided a method of making a single mode optical fibre

preset attenuator characterised in that the two ends of a stub length of glass fibre possessing no internal waveguiding structure are fusion spliced to the ends of two lengths of single mode glass optical fibre.

5 There follows a description of the manufacture of a single mode optical fibre preset attenuator embodying the invention in a preferred form. The description refers to the accompanying drawings in which:

10 Figure 1 depicts an attenuator after the initial stage of manufacture and before adjustment,

Figures 2 and 3 depict attenuators respectively after adjustment to reduce the attenuation, and after adjustment to increase the attenuation,

15 Figure 4 is a graph showing the relationship between stub length and attenuation, and

Figure 5 depicts a schematic perspective view of the completed attenuator mounted in a protective housing.

20 A length 1 of single mode glass optical fibre, is cleaved in conventional manner preparatory for fusion splicing. Similarly a length of glass fibre possessing no internal waveguiding structure is also cleaved to prepare it for fusion splicing. The two fibres are then electric arc fusion spliced in conventional manner to form the fusion splice 2. Next the glass fibre 25 possessing no internal waveguding structure is cleaved for a second time to leave a short stub 3 of the fibre attached to fibre 1.

Typically the length of this stub is between 0.1 and 1.5 mm long according to the amount of attenuation 30 required.

Then a second length 4 of single mode glass optical fibre is cleaved before being fusion spliced to the stub 3 so as to form the fusion splice 5.

Core mode light that is launched into the core 6 of fibre 1 in a direction to propagate towards fusion splice 2 spreads out in a cone 7 upon entering the stub 3 so that not all of it is launched as core mode light into

the core 8 of the second fibre 4. The amount that is 'lost' (i.e. is radiated or is launched in cladding modes) depends upon the length of the stub. If the length of the stub is found not to provide the precise value of attenuation required, this value can be altered by using the splicing equipment to heat-soften an intermediate portion of its length, and then either advancing the spliced ends of fibres 1 and 4 axially inwardly towards each other, or retracting them axially away from each other according to whether it is desired to reduce the attenuation value (Figure 2) or to increase the attenuation (Figure 3).

Figure 4 is a graph showing some measured values of attenuation plotted as a function of stub length for some single mode vapour deposited silica fibre having an outside diameter of 125 microns and a step index equivalent core diameter of 9 microns based on a refractive index step of 0.0033. For the purposes of comparison these plots are set against a curve depicting the theoretical attenuation based on the step index equivalent fibre. By way of example one attenuator was initially made with a stub length providing a measured attenuation value of 17.1 dB. This attenuator was replaced in the fusion splicing equipment and, while the central region of the stub was maintained by the arc in a heat softened condition, the ends of the two fibres were advanced towards each other by about 0.20 mm to reduce the attenuation to a measured value of 15.4 dB.

The value of attenuation provided by this attenuator is liable to be changed if a bend is put into the system in the region of the splices, and hence it is generally desirable to house this region in some form of structure providing restraint against bending. Since the fusion splices are liable to provide a localised region of mechanical weakness, the employment of such a structure may also be useful in providing additional protection against the effects of tensile stress. One

form that this support structure can take is depicted in Figure 5 and consists of a stainless steel tube 50 whose bore is large enough to accept the plastics protective coatings 51 and 52 that envelop the fibres 1 and 4 except 5 in the regions from which they have been removed in order to effect fusion splicing to the stub 3. The length of the tube 50, typically about 3 cm long, is chosen so that the ends 53, 54 of the plastics coatings enter the ends of the tube 50. The interior is filled with adhesive 10 (not shown), typically epoxy resin, to secure the assembly. In order to facilitate the filling of the tube a portion of its wall is removed from a central section of the tube so that the adhesive can be introduced centrally and caused to flow outwardly towards the ends 15 of the tube.

Generally it is desirable to take steps to ensure that any light propagating in cladding modes in either of the fibres 1 and 4 is stripped before there is any risk of it coupling back into core modes to an 20 excessive extent. This means that it will generally be desirable to ensure that cladding modes are stripped from the fibre that is being used to launch light into the stub because the stub is a region of high coupling between the core and cladding modes. Such cladding modes 25 may be present here as a result of their having been injected upstream, for instance at a connector or splice. It also means that it will generally be desirable to ensure that cladding modes are quickly stripped from the fibre into which the light propagating 30 in the stub is launched because the optical power here launched into the cladding modes of this fibre is relatively high.

If the fibres being spliced to the stub 3 already include a cladding modes stripper within their 35 structure no special action will be necessary to achieve the desired stripping. In the absence of such a structure the requisite stripping may be achieved by

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removing the plastics coatings 51 and 52 from fibres 1
and 4 in regions upstream and downstream of the tube 40
and coating the exposed fibres with an absorbing paint.
The stripped regions may each be typically between 5 and
5 25 cm in length. They are not necessarily of equal
length, and in a typical system we have found a higher
degree of mode stripping was required on the downstream
side than on the upstream side. Mechanical protection
for the mode stripping regions is conveniently provided
10 by inserting both of them together with the intervening
tube 50 into a U-shaped channel (not shown) which is then
filled with a suitable adhesive such as an epoxy resin.

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CLAIMS:-

1. A method of making a single mode optical fibre preset attenuator characterised in that the two ends of a stub length of glass fibre possessing no internal waveguiding structure are fusion spliced to the ends of two lengths of single mode glass optical fibre.
- 5 2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein after the two fusion splices have been made the fusion splicing equipment used for this purpose is then used to heat soften a portion of the stub intermediate its ends, and wherein, while the heat-softened state is maintained, one of the optical fibres is moved axially with respect to the other so as to alter the separation of the ends of the stub and thereby produce a fine tuning of the value 10 of the attenuation provided by the attenuator.
- 15 3. A method as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein after the two fusion splices have been made, and after adjustment, if any, has been made to the stub length, the two splices are secured in a protective housing.
- 20 4. A method as claimed in claim 3 wherein the splices are secured by means of adhesive in a housing of generally tubular shape.
5. A single mode optical fibre preset attenuator made by the method claimed in any preceding claim.
- 25 6. An attenuator as claimed in claim 5, wherein each of the two single mode fibres includes a cladding modes stripper within the fibre structure.
7. An attenuator as claimed in claim 5, wherein each of the two single mode fibres is provided with a 30 localised cladding modes stripper zone adjacent the stub.

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Fig . 1.

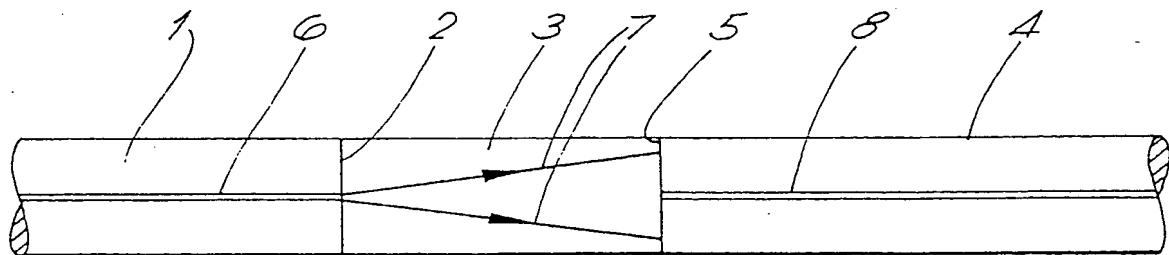


Fig . 2.

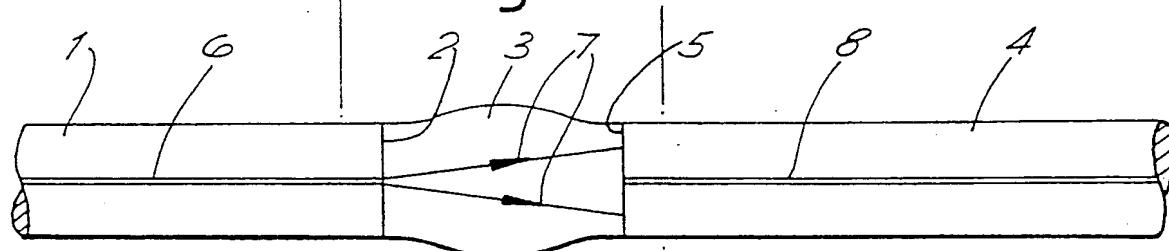
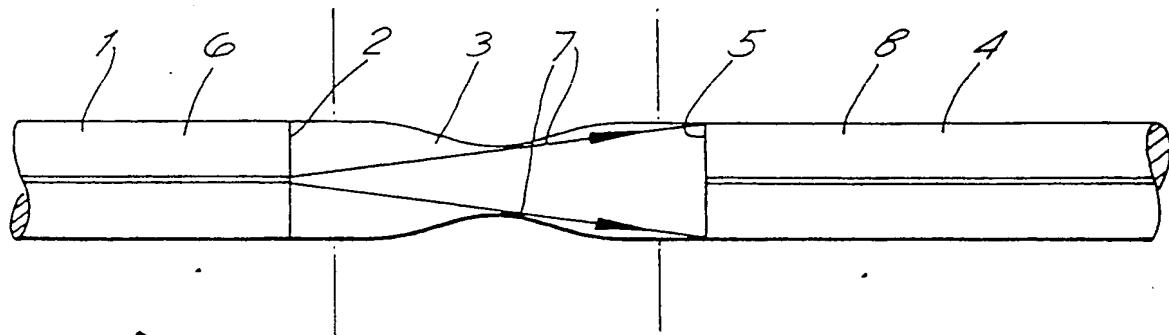


Fig . 3.



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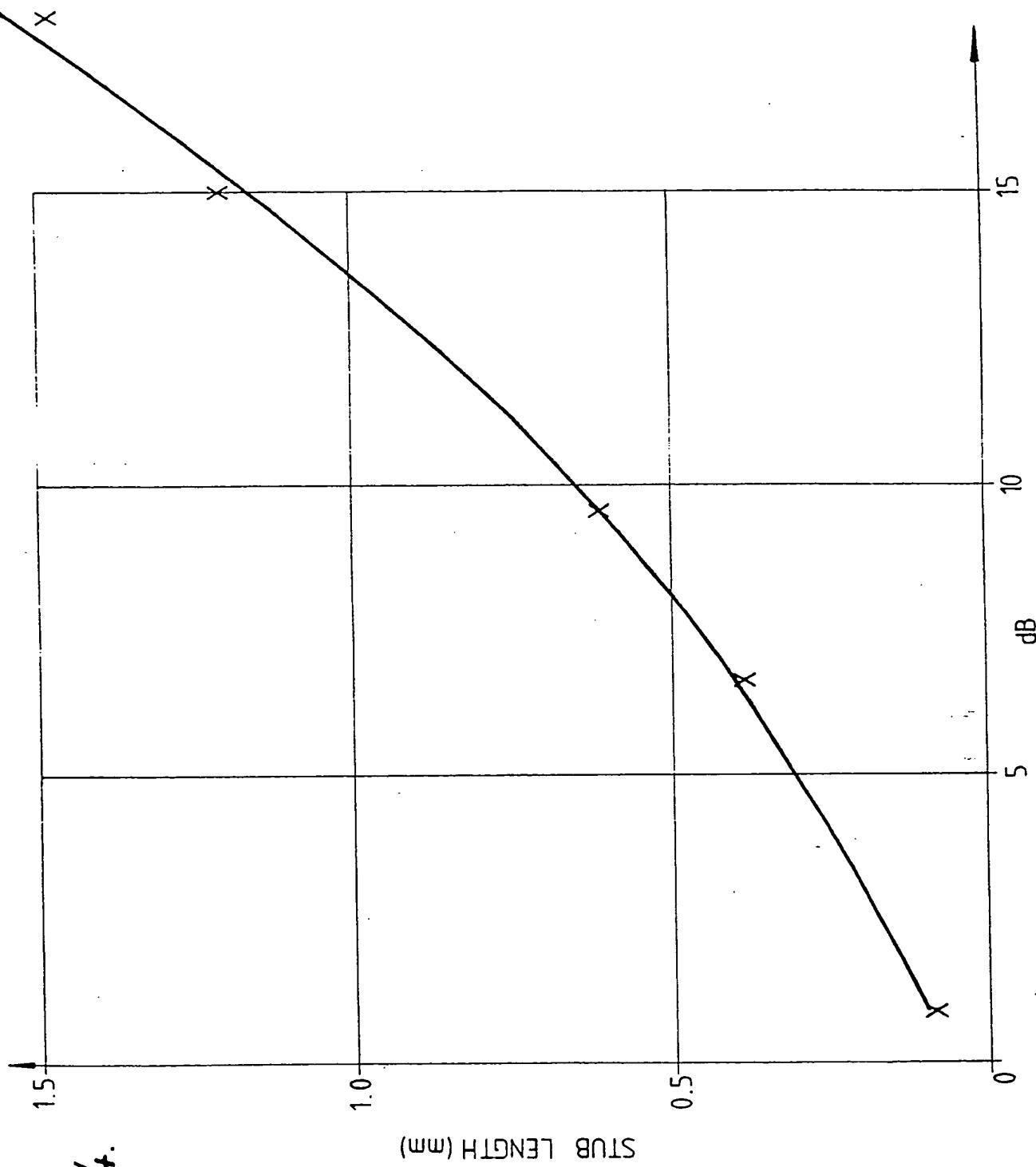


Fig. 4.

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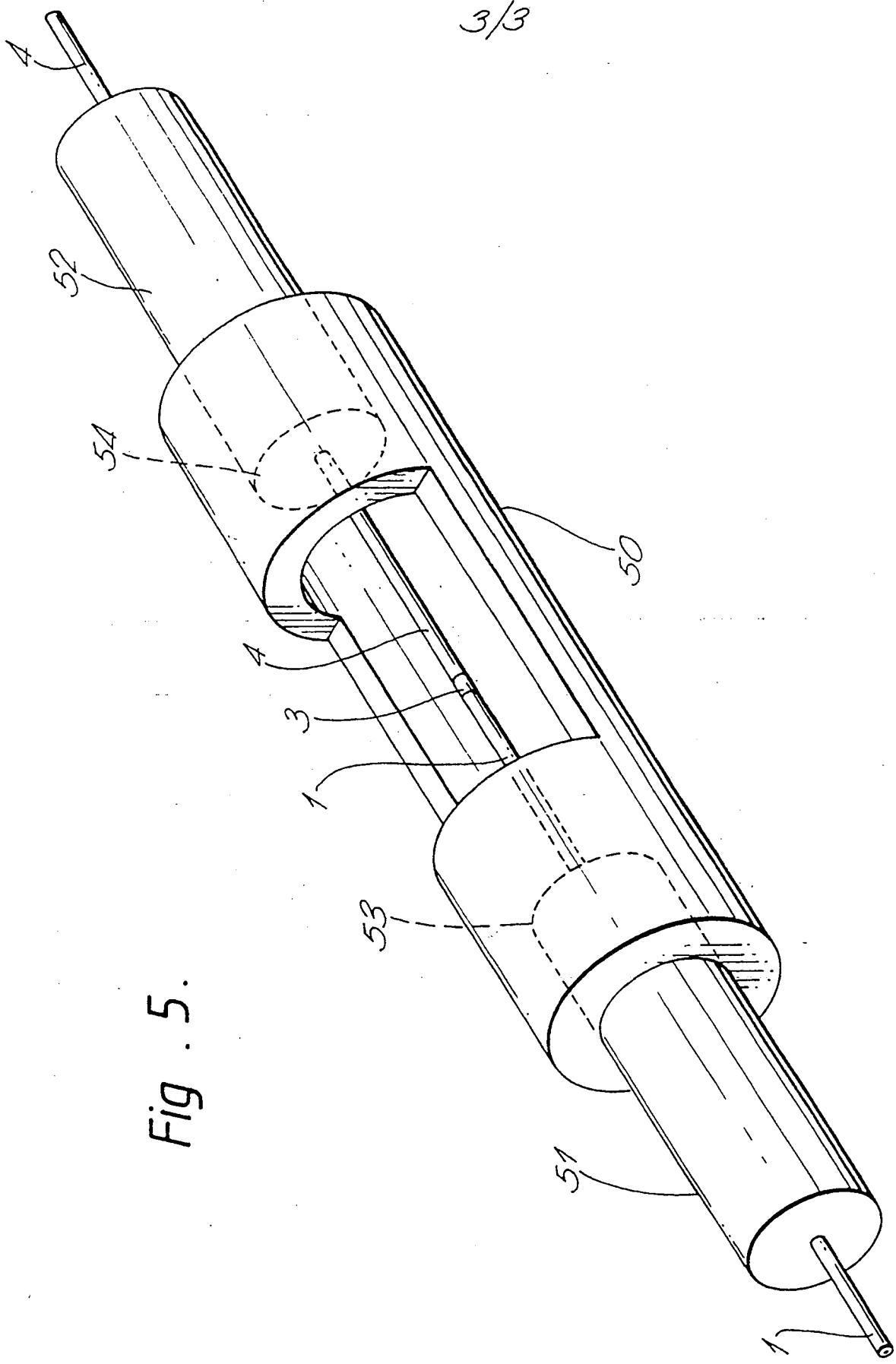


Fig . 5.